

Winter 2004

Cookbook Roundup

Andrea Kempf

Johnson County Community College, akempf@jccc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/lib_pp



Part of the [Food Science Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kempf, Andrea, "Cookbook Roundup" (2004). *Library Papers and Presentations*. 7.
http://scholarspace.jccc.edu/lib_pp/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Billington Library at ScholarSpace @ JCCC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Papers and Presentations by an authorized administrator of ScholarSpace @ JCCC. For more information, please contact bbaile14@jccc.edu.

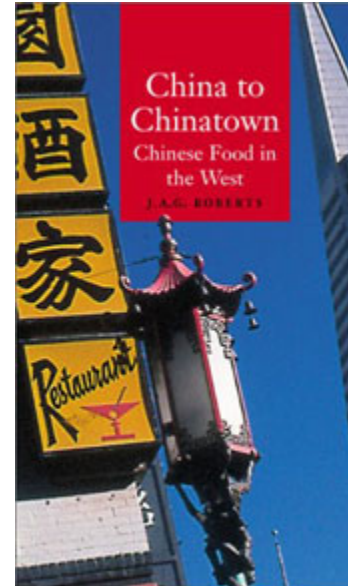
COOKBOOK ROUNDUP

Recently published books on Asian cuisine

by Andrea Kempf

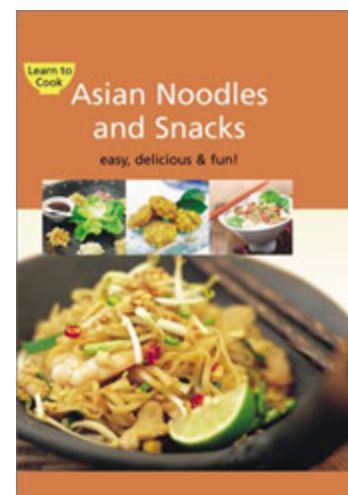
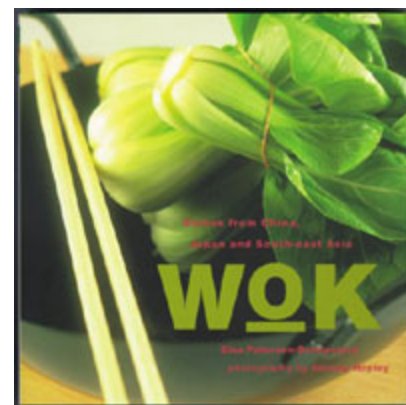
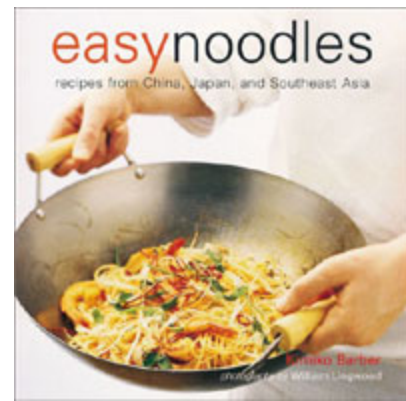
The taste for Asian cuisine is a global phenomenon that has not only spawned restaurants, cookbooks, and specialty food stores throughout the West, but also caught the attention of economists and historians. In [*China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West*](#) (Reaktion Books, 2002, \$29.95), J. A. G. Roberts, a British lecturer in Chinese history, examines Westerners' reactions to Chinese food from the earliest encounters to today and the current proliferation of Chinese restaurants in almost every city in the world. The most interesting part of Roberts's study is the first half, "West to East," in which he describes early Western encounters with Chinese food by quoting from the letters and diaries of missionaries, travelers, and diplomats. For example, in the fifteenth century, a Dominican friar, Gaspar da Cruz, described the methods used in Guangzhou for cooking dogs. Two hundred years later, the French Jesuit Jean-Baptiste du Halde, although not overly fond of the Chinese taste for "stags-pizzles or bears-paws," remarked, "The French Cooks who have refined so much in everything that concerns the palate would be surpriz'd to find that the Chinese can outdo them far in this Branch of their Business and at a great deal less Expence." Roberts describes the uncompromising attitudes of some individuals who persisted in maintaining Western tables despite longtime residence in the East (the wife of a missionary published "Preparing Western Food" so that Chinese cooks could be trained to please the families for whom they worked) and the joy of other visitors in their new culinary experiences (missionaries from the China Inland Mission were advised to adopt the Chinese diet "as far as health and constitution will allow.") The second part of Roberts's study, "East to West," examines the globalization of Chinese food in the twentieth century, and here the book becomes relatively dry and academic, more statistical than anecdotal. In this section, he also compares the spread of Chinese food in the West with that of other ethnic cuisines.

After reading Roberts's book, it will come as no surprise that



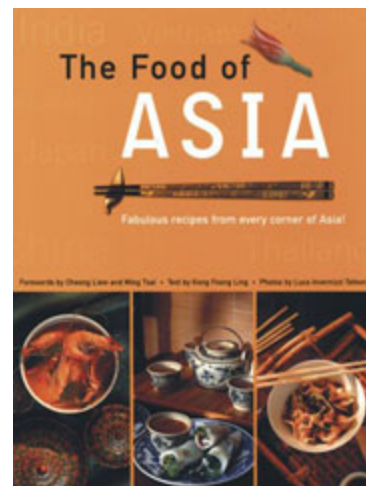
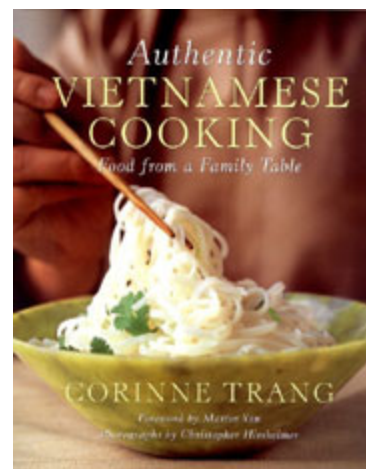
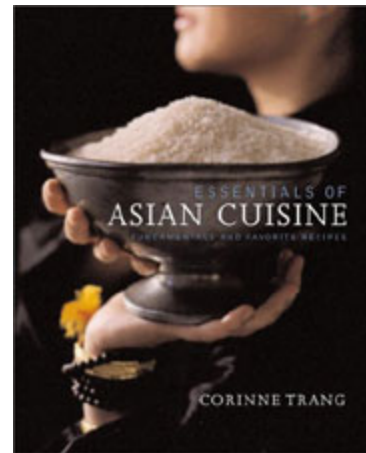
large numbers of English-language cookbooks devoted to Asian cuisines are published every year in the United States and Great Britain, as well as in Asia. Among the latest offerings are a number of cookbooks for beginners, some for the intermediate cook, and a few for experienced chefs. Here are some of the most useful and appealing recently released titles.

For the novice at preparing Asian cuisine, there are a number of books to choose from. [*Easy Noodles: Recipes from China, Japan, and Southeast Asia*](#) by Kimiko Barber (Ryland Peters & Small, 2003, \$12.95) is an introduction to the myriad varieties of Asian noodles, from Korean *dang myun* (made of sweet-potato starch) to Japanese buckwheat *soba*. It contains twenty-six easily executed dishes—among them Vietnamese crab noodle soup and a tangy Burmese fish curry with rice vermicelli—and a few essential recipes for dipping sauces, such as Vietnamese *nuóc cham* and chile oil. Each dish is beautifully photographed by William Lingwood. In [*Wok: Dishes from China, Japan, and Southeast Asia*](#) (Ryland Peters & Small, 2002, \$12.95), Elsa Petersen-Schepelern introduces the use of the wok, that versatile vessel found in every kitchen in East and Southeast Asia. After a brief discussion of wok lore in which she explains how to season and clean a wok, as well as what additional equipment may be needed (for example, steamers, smoking racks, and long cooking chopsticks), Petersen-Schepelern presents thirty recipes that can be made in a wok. In some, such as Chinese dumplings and Japanese steamed fish on *soba* with seaweed, the wok is used as a steamer; in others, like Thai marinated chicken and Vietnamese shaking beef, it is used for stir-frying; and in still others, like Thai crab cakes, for gentle sautéing. [*Learn to Cook Asian Noodles and Snacks*](#) (Tuttle, 2003, \$9.95) is a small, modest book that is easy to use. This volume has the added benefit of providing a neophyte cook with an accurate estimate of how long the meal will take to prepare, something lacking in the previous two volumes; those who are in a hurry will find it comes in handy. A grilled lemongrass beef noodle salad took exactly the one hour of preparation and cooking time that the authors anticipated and was a perfect dish for a summer day. Tangy fresh pineapple shrimp noodles were on the table in less than a half hour, while braised bean threads with shrimp in a clay pot took even less time to prepare. More important, every one of these one-dish meals is delicious. The recipes may be geared to Western cooks, but the flavor of

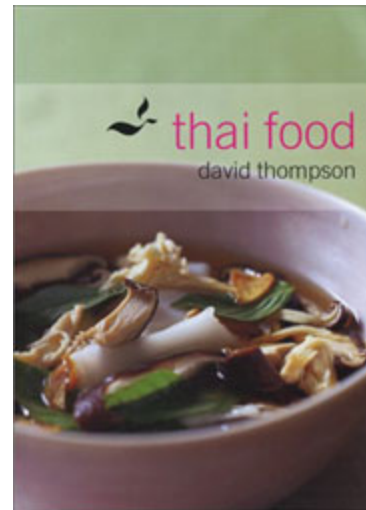


Asia is authentic.

Two other cookbooks that are pan-Asian in scope are geared to the more experienced cook. In Corinne Trang's ambitious [*The Essentials of Asian Cuisine: Fundamentals and Favorite Recipes*](#) (Simon & Schuster, 2003, \$40), the recipes are arranged by type of food rather than region, allowing cooks to recognize the similarities between soups or vegetables or meat dishes from the cuisines of China, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Philippines. For example, when the Mongols swept through Asia and introduced their simple lamb hot pot, the recipe was adopted and modified to become *da bin low*, the more sophisticated Cantonese version of a hot pot, the subtle Japanese *shabu-shabu*, and Korea's hearty *kalbi t'ang*. Trang, who teaches in the culinary arts program at Drexel University and is also the author of the highly acclaimed [*Authentic Vietnamese Cooking: Food from a Family Table*](#) (Simon & Schuster, 1999, \$30), goes into extensive detail about the nature of ingredients and the yin and yang of food preparation, "how to blend all ingredients harmoniously so that they may be tasted separately, while coming together on the palate." While her recipes are adapted for Western cooks and include substitutions for hard-to-find ingredients, they are lengthy and somewhat complicated. Their difficulty is mitigated, however, by the author's conversational style as she guides readers through meal preparation. [*The Food of Asia: Fabulous Recipes from Every Corner of Asia*](#) by Kong Foong Ling, with photographs by Luca Invernizzi Tettoni (Periplus/Tuttle, 2002, \$22.95), an encyclopedic work that covers Asia from Burma to Vietnam, is a repackaged, slightly updated, paperback version of the 1998 hardcover edition originally published in Asia and Great Britain. The book contains a lengthy general introduction to Asian food, ingredients, and cooking techniques; each country also has at least a two-page culinary introduction, with photographs of the land and people, followed by representative recipes. Most of the ingredients are readily available in supermarkets or Asian grocery stores, but a few may be difficult to find. In the Kansas City metropolitan area, where I live, I can buy fresh lemongrass, most Indian spices, tamarinds, noodles of all kinds, and a wide variety of bottled fish, oyster, soy, and fermented-bean sauces, but nowhere can I locate galangal, stink beans, or kaffir lime leaves. A cook could spend a lifetime with this volume discovering new dishes and flavors.



For those with more specific interests, there are a number of cookbooks devoted to the cuisines of more limited geographic areas or of particular countries. One of the most attractive is [Thai Food](#) by David Thompson (Ten Speed Press, 2002, \$40). Thompson is a noted Australian chef and restaurateur with a passion for preserving the historic techniques of Thai cooking. His book is uncompromising in its authenticity. Many recipes call for fifteen to twenty separate ingredients, and many of those ingredients are not easily located in American specialty shops. However, if you can manage to find them, the results of his recipes are elegant and sophisticated Thai dishes. Among my favorites are a hearty Chiang Mai curried noodle and chicken soup for a cold evening and an elegant red curry of scallops. Thompson devotes the first 180 pages of his book to a succinct history of Thailand itself, with a discussion of how the historical influences of immigration and invasion have altered regional cuisine. Northern Thailand, bordering on Burma, Laos, and China, is more ethnically diverse, and the cuisine reflects this diversity. Southern Thailand is more dependent on fish and seafood, and also has a significant Muslim population, with its own culinary specialties. His detailed explanation of unfamiliar ingredients, like pandanus leaf or hydrolyzed lime water, and his discussion of cooking techniques, like the difference between blanching and slow blanching, are valuable additions to this exploration of a cuisine that is rapidly growing in popularity in the West. *Thai Food* is enhanced by the fine photography of Earl Carter. Although it will be challenging to the casual cook, this winner of a 2003 James Beard Kitchenaid Award for International Cookbooks and the 2003 Glenfiddich Food and Drink Award is as good as it gets.



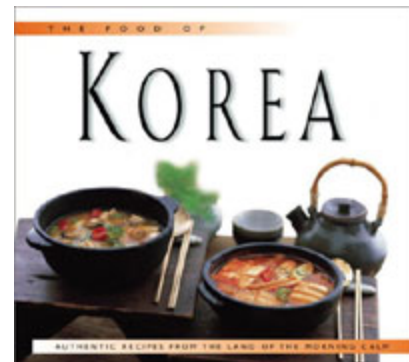
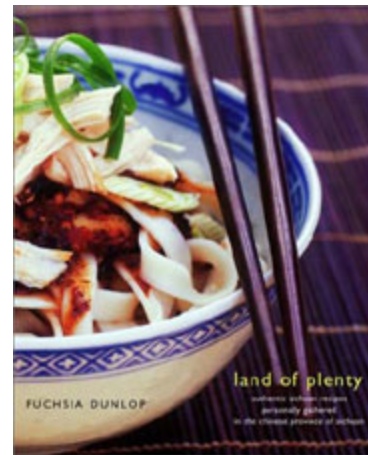
Christine Sjahrir Hwang's [Singaporean, Malaysian & Indonesian Cuisine](#) (Wei-Chuan Cookbooks, 2002, \$15.95), is another challenging book on Southeast Asian cuisine. Hwang, a third-generation Sumatran of Chinese descent, discusses the similarities between these three national cuisines, all of which have been altered by Chinese, Indian, and Western colonial influences. Each island in Indonesia has certain culinary distinctions. Javanese recipes rely heavily on shrimp paste; Padang dishes use hot chiles; Sumatran cooks are more likely to use Middle Eastern and Indian spices. The "Nyonya" kitchen, a blending of Chinese and Malay foods



that employs ingredients and techniques from both cultures, is Hwang's specialty.

Among the new Chinese cookbooks is [*Land of Plenty: Authentic Recipes Personally Gathered in the Chinese Province of Sichuan*](#) (W.W. Norton, 2003, \$30) by Fuchsia Dunlop, who spent several years studying at the Sichuan Institute of Higher Cuisine in Chengdu, the province's capital. Replete with food folklore and totally authentic recipes, this is the best Sichuan cookbook available in English. In *Land of Plenty*, you get more than recipes, you gain entry to an entire culture. The name of each recipe is rendered in calligraphy by Qu Lei Lei, and there is a pronunciation guide so that you will properly pronounce the name of the dishes you prepare. Her deadpan introduction to the spicy Sichuan pepper, "... its numbing effect allows people to consume more chiles than would otherwise be humanly possible," is typical of her ability to combine folk wisdom and information in an engaging manner. The recipe for *mapo dofu* relates the Qing-dynasty origin of this popular Sichuan dish. However, Dunlop also provides many easy-to-prepare, but unfamiliar dishes, like rabbit with Sichuan pepper, which is both piquant and delicious. It is, however, Dunlop's introduction to each dish that sets this cookbook apart as she limns the cultural connotations of a recipe, discusses the accessibility of ingredients, and speaks about how to properly serve the dish. This ambitious entry is sure to remain a classic in the field.

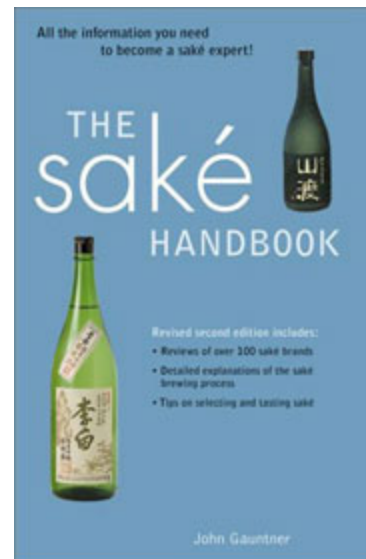
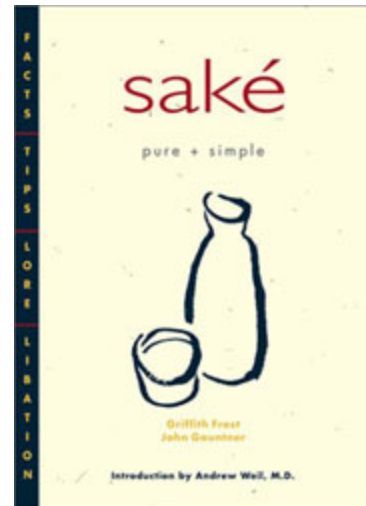
[*The Food of Korea: Authentic Recipes from the Land of Morning Calm*](#) (Periplus, 2002, \$18.95), compiled by British food writer David Clive Price from the recipes of the chefs of Seoul's Shilla Hotel Restaurant, in addition to providing excellent recipes, is full of information on Korean culture and eating customs. According to Price, a good deal of the Korean diet has developed following health considerations. Folk wisdom suggests, for example, that garlic cleanses the blood and should be eaten in abundance; that chicken and pork may lead to obesity (and so are not prevalent in the Korean diet); that if you have had too much to drink, a dish of dried pollack, bean sprouts, and tofu will cure your hangover. There is a discussion of important staples of Korean cuisine, like kimchi and ginseng, and a section on table setting and etiquette. A number of the recipes are easy to prepare. *Yukgaejang*, a spicy beef stew, took less than fifteen minutes, and tasted exactly as it does in my neighborhood Korean



restaurant.

But the greatest number of recently published books about food, and drink, in Asia are not about China, which many consider the wellspring from which Asian cuisine emanates, but from its neighbor to the east, Japan. For saké aficionados, there are two books that explore the history and brewing processes of the Japanese rice wine: [Saké Pure + Simple](#) by Griffith Frost and John Gauntner (Stonebridge Press, 2nd edition, 2002, \$9.95) and [The Saké Handbook](#), also by Gauntner, (Tuttle, 2nd revised edition, 2002, \$12.95). While both books evaluate brands and provide directories of saké retailers in the United States, [Saké Pure + Simple](#), although less detailed, is the more engaging of the two. It includes poetry and sayings about saké (like this one to try on a supervisor, "A good drink fills me with courage and creates in me the drive to get some work done"); a few excellent recipes for cooking with saké (two of my personal favorites are heavenly pearl shrimp and fresh berries with golden sake sauce), and clever line drawings by L. J. C. Shimoda. [The Saké Handbook](#) offers a much more detailed evaluation of different brands and a guide to Tokyo's myriad saké pubs, complete with maps indicating proximity to public transportation. It is of great value to someone living in or traveling to Tokyo. After consulting [The Handbook](#), a well-heeled tourist may want to sample the saké at Amanogowa, a highly recommended pub at the Keio Plaza Hotel, while a longtime resident may opt for the more reasonably priced Sakanatei, hidden on the fourth floor of Koike Building, but known for its wide selection of saké and inventive menus.

A 1985 classic of Japanese culinary philosophy, [The Fine Art of Japanese Food Arrangement](#) by Yoshio Tsuchiya (Kodansha, 2002, \$35), has just been reissued in paperback. Whether you look at this book from a culinary, artistic, or aesthetic point of view, the information is unmatched. Tsuchiya lovingly explains the principles behind a Japanese meal. He describes the methods of arranging food for each course, for both everyday meals and special occasions. The reader will learn how to time the serving of food so that hot and cold dishes appear at the appropriate times; how to select vessels, making sure that convenience and harmony are respected while following the convention that no two bowls of the same shape or style should ever be used in succession.

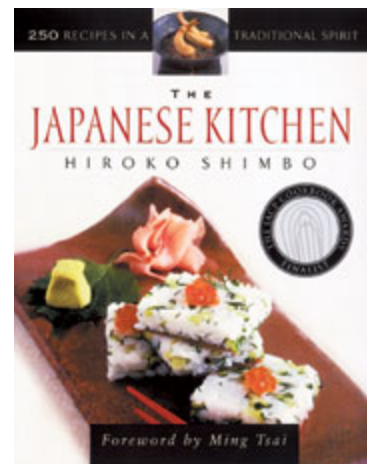
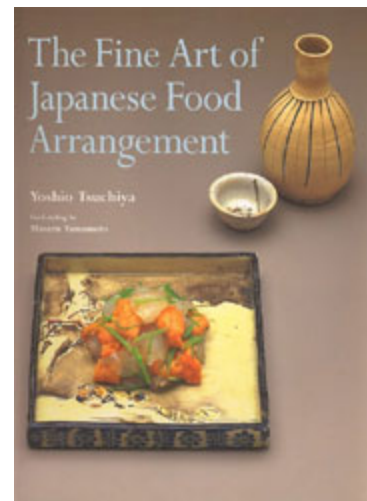


The food styling by Masaru Yamamoto, a well-respected Kyoto caterer, is elegantly photographed by Eiji Kôri: a dish of turnips and shrimp becomes a work of art. In addition, the book includes photographs of antique food vessels from Japanese museums and private collections, making *The Fine Art of Japanese Food Arrangement* as much an art book as a manual for the presentation of Japanese cuisine.

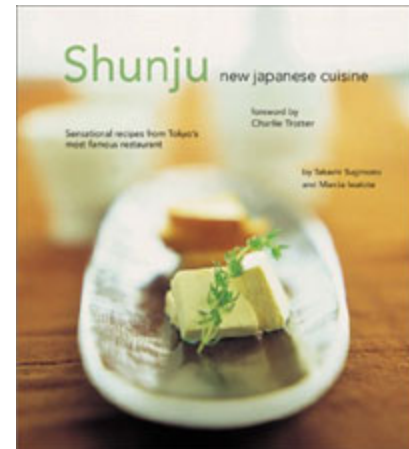
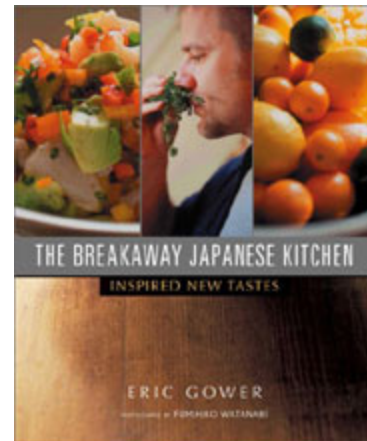
Once you gain an appreciation of food arrangement, the next step is to begin cooking. [*The Japanese Kitchen: 250 Recipes in a Traditional Spirit*](#) by Hiroko Shimbo (Harvard Common, 2000, \$18.95) is a joy to use. The author chats with the reader/cook as one friend to another. The book begins with an extensive introduction to Japanese cooking and its ingredients. Recipes are clearly defined, and cooking techniques are explained. Shimbo also provides useful ingredient substitutions: if you can't buy chrysanthemum leaves, use spinach; leeks are a good substitute for Japanese green onions. Although this is not a glitzy volume with splashy photography, Rodica Prato's delicate illustrations of ingredients, finished dishes, and cooking techniques are both charming and useful.

The more adventurous Japanese cook will enjoy [*Sushi: Taste and Techniques*](#) by Kimiko Barber and Hiroki Takemura (DK, 2002, \$20). This London-based duo has written a history of sushi with a thorough explanation of utensils, techniques, and ingredients. For those who fillet fish, or even for those who don't, the diagrams of individual fish and shellfish, showing the appropriate locations from which to cut the sushi are fascinating. You will learn that a mackerel should have a silvery white belly and clear eyes and that a lemon sole with a fat belly may be pregnant. Variations on traditional sushi are discussed, e.g., Tokyo style, in which the sashimi is arranged on a bed of rice, or Kansai style, where the ingredients are cooked and mixed together with the sushi rice, and suggestions for proper food and drink accompaniments are also provided. One of the most charming recipes is for children's sushi shaped with cookie cutters and topped with sliced salmon and ham. Whether it's pressed sushi, hand-rolled sushi, or the popular thick rolls, Ian O'Leary illustrates each step with photographs that will make your mouth water.

If, on the other hand, you're bored with traditional cuisine, two new titles explore fusion cooking from the Japanese

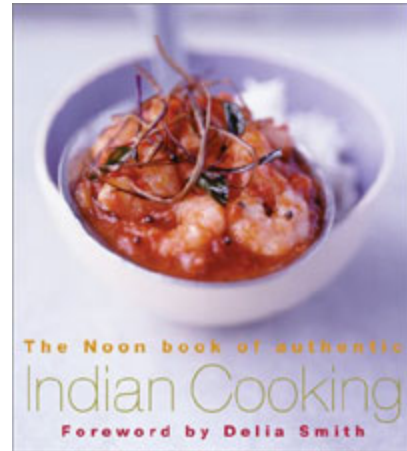


kitchen. In [*The Breakaway Japanese Kitchen*](#) (Kodansha, 2003. \$27), California chef Eric Gower uses an interesting mixture of American and Japanese ingredients to create unusual dishes with a Japanese flair: tofu salmon mousse, shitake pesto. The results are more Californian than Japanese, but Gower's recipes are clear and most ingredients are available in American supermarkets. The photographs by Fumihiko Watanabe display a Japanese style of presentation that is both aesthetic and appealing. [*Shunju: New Japanese Cuisine*](#) (Periplus, 2002, \$49.95) by the restaurateurs Takashi Sugimoto and Marcia Iwatate is a Japanese take on fusion cuisine. The recipes are distinctly Japanese, but infused with a touch of the West. This is not a cookbook for novices. As the authors move through the year, offering the readers recipes that reflect the fresh ingredients of each season, this exquisite book, with photographs by Masano Kawana, expects the highest ability of cooks. Ingredients are eclectic, with substitutions suggested, but cooking techniques are sophisticated without explanations of their execution. How many kitchens have blowtorches to finish a gratin of strawberries? And how many cooks know how to measure half an egg? The authors' account of a spring trip to the mountains to harvest fresh bamboo shoots is followed by a variety of recipes for bamboo shoots: deep fried with bonito flakes; simply served as sashimi; and braised with seaweed. Winter brings heartier meals like anglerfish liver and braised daikon with glazed sauce and a complex recipe for *tamago*, a Japanese omelet. Sugimoto and Iwatate have made a great success of their several Shunju restaurants in Tokyo, and this cookbook will give readers the opportunity to experience the Shunju style when they can't visit Tokyo.



[*The Noon Book of Authentic Indian Cooking*](#) by the Indian food entrepreneur Gulan Noon (Tuttle, 2001. \$21.95) is arranged by the regions and cooking styles of India. It includes recipes from areas like Goa and Chennai—for instance, an unusual and tasty *nilgiri* lamb *korma*—as well as the better-known Moghlai and Bengali dishes like *murg tikka masala* or *saag paneer*. The book is designed for the Western cook, although the ingredients may have to be purchased in Indian grocery stores. Not only are there photographs of various recipes, but also extensive photography of India by Richard Lewisohn and Travel Ink. This is another inviting volume to introduce Westerners to relatively authentic dishes.

Preparing meals from these cookbooks is one way to immerse yourself in Asia without traveling there. Reading the rich assortment of cultural, historical, and culinary lore within each volume is a journey in and of itself. As J. A. G. Roberts concludes in *China to Chinatown*, the culinary East has arrived in the West. How fortunate we are.



Andrea Kempf is a professor and librarian at Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas. As well as being an amateur cook, she is a regular reviewer for *Persimmon* and *Library Journal*.

[HOME](#) | [ABOUT PERSIMMON](#) | [CURRENT ISSUE](#) | [PREVIOUS ISSUES](#) | [ORDER](#) | [SUBMISSIONS](#) | [LINKS](#)

persimmon.mag@worldnet.att.net

© 2003 by Contemporary Asian Culture, Inc. All rights reserved.